

SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION AND POLICIES IN CALIFORNIA MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS: RESULTS FROM THE SCHOOL HEALTH PROFILES SURVEYS AND COMPLIANCE WITH THE CALIFORNIA HEALTHY YOUTH ACT (CHYA)



About the California Healthy Youth Act (CHYA)

CHYA was enacted on January 1, 2016 and requires that public schools ensure all students in grade seven to 12 receive comprehensive sexual health education at least once in middle school and once in high school. CHYA outlines the requirements for comprehensive sexual health education curriculum, including: five primary purposes of the law; 14 specified criteria, seven of which were assessed in this analysis; and 11 key instructional topics. There is currently no mechanism in place to monitor whether schools are complying with CHYA requirements.

About the School Health Profiles Survey (Profiles)

Profiles assesses school health policies and practices in states, territories, and large school districts. It is conducted biennially by state and local agencies among middle and high school principals and lead health education teachers, with technical assistance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Among other topics, Profiles monitors school requirements related to sexual health education.

METHODS

We analyzed California Profiles survey results from the teacher questionnaire to improve our understanding of how California schools implemented the required criteria and instructional topics of CHYA before and after the law was enacted in 2016. We mapped questions from the Profiles survey to CHYA requirements and determined that we could assess 16 out of 25 requirements. The 2014 survey provided baseline data to assess 12 requirements, and new questions added in 2016 provided baseline data to assess four additional requirements. All baseline rates were compared to results from the 2018 survey. Meaningful improvement was defined as an absolute increase of 10 percent or greater from baseline to 2018.

SUMMARY OF ASSESSED CHYA REQUIREMENTS

Characteristics of instruction and materials:

1. Inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) people
2. Affirmatively recognizes same-sex relationships
3. Discusses gender, gender identity, and gender expression
4. Encourages parent/guardian communication
5. Teaches value of committed relationships
6. Discusses value of maintaining committed relationships
7. Builds knowledge and skills to form healthy relationships
8. Builds knowledge and skills to make healthy decisions about sexual health
9. Shares information about nature of HIV and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
10. Shares information about how HIV and other STDs are transmitted
11. Discusses abstinence and other medically accurate methods of preventing pregnancy and STDs
12. Discusses the methods to prevent/reduce risk of HIV and other STDs that are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
13. Discusses social views of HIV and AIDS
14. Shares information about local sexual health resources
15. Discusses all FDA-approved contraceptive methods
16. Shares information about sexual violence

KEY FINDINGS

1. CHYA compliance increased: Both middle schools and high schools had improved compliance in at least some of the assessed requirements two years after CHYA became law (2018).

2. Middle schools showed meaningful improvement in more CHYA requirements than high schools. Middle schools showed meaningful improvement in compliance in 15 out of 16 assessed CHYA requirements while high schools showed meaningful improvement in only three out of 16 assessed requirements. This suggests that CHYA has had a greater relative impact on the delivery of sexual health education in middle schools, which reported more instructional gaps at baseline.

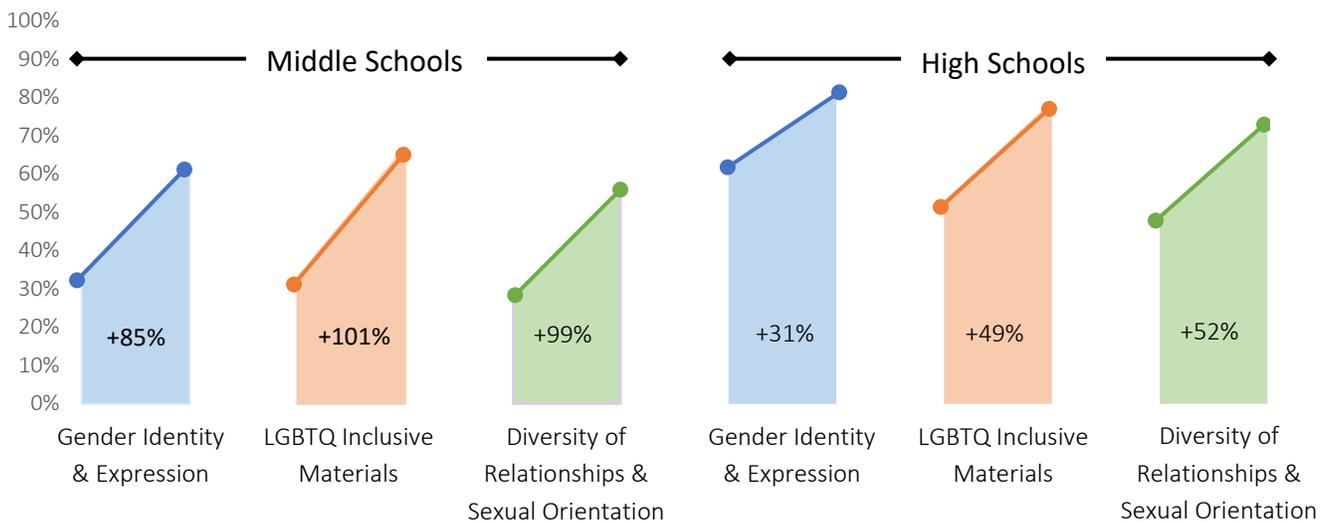
3. High schools had higher compliance rates overall. Despite showing less dramatic improvements, in 2018 high schools showed compliance rates of 75 percent or greater for 15 out of 16 requirements while middle schools showed compliance rates of 75 percent or greater for only three out of 16 requirements.

4. Gaps remain in the sexual health education taught in both middle schools and high schools. In 2018, only:

25% of middle schools & 36% of high schools reported that **instruction and materials encourage students to communicate with parents or other trusted adults** about human sexuality

47% of middle schools reported that **instruction and materials include information about the effectiveness and safety of FDA-approved methods to prevent HIV**

5. Middle schools and high schools made the biggest relative improvements in the following requirements:



LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to using the Profiles data to monitor how well schools are implementing the requirements of CHYA. Profiles data is self-reported, and a statewide representative sample was weighted from responses received from about 200 high schools and 100 middle schools, representing nine percent of all public secondary schools statewide. Survey questions varied from year to year, which limited our analysis for some CHYA requirements. Profiles was not specifically designed to evaluate CHYA, so the language in the Profiles teacher questionnaire and the text of the law did not match precisely. Subject matter experts made informed decisions about which survey questions and legal requirements closely aligned. For all requirements, meaningful improvement was defined as an absolute increase of 10 percent or greater from baseline to 2018 regardless of whether the question was first asked on the 2014 survey (12 requirements) or the 2016 survey (four requirements). Finally, CHYA requirements without any matching profiles questions were not assessed (Table 1).

TABLE 1. CHYA REQUIREMENTS NOT ASSESSED:

- Information about HIV prevention through decreasing needle use/sharing
- Information about treating HIV/STDs and how use of antiretrovirals can prolong lives and reduce HIV transmission
- Stigma of HIV and AIDS
- Local sexual assault resources
- Information on emergency contraception and pregnancy options
- Information on human trafficking and other sexual harassment and abuse